"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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Disadvantaged Classes in Rural Life

By DWIGHT SANDERSON

LAST year at Manhattan in analyzing the rural population I pointed out that there are definite classes of rural people who are distinctly disadvantaged and that from the standpoint of human conservation they are the people who most need consideration. This year we devote ourselves to their study. This seems to be an expression of the trend in our national thinking. The continued depression has forced us to give thought to our disadvantaged classes.

It is not my intention to deal in any detail with the different disadvantaged classes in rural life. My purpose is to state the general situation, attempt to ascertain whether there are any common conditions affecting the status of the disadvantaged classes, and to suggest what remedial measures may well be considered; in short, to set the stage, and raise the curtain upon certain questions which may be fruitful for discussion.

The Situation

What, then, are the facts? Dr. Carl C. Taylor and his associates in the Division of Farm Population and Rural Life of the United States Department of Agriculture, have recently issued a report on the Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture,[1] which may well form a textbook for this meeting. This report is based chiefly on the federal census of 1929, which was a relatively good year for American agriculture. In this report the authors describe the numbers and distribution of the four classes to be discussed in our program.

Some of the outstanding facts brought out in the summary of this report are as follows:

"In 1929 over one-fourth of the farms in the Nation produced less than $600 worth of products including the products of the farm used by the family. Nearly one-half produced less than $1000 worth of products."

"There are more than a half-million farms in the United States on land that is so poor that it will literally starve the families living on it if they continue to try to make a living by farming it."

"There are 240 counties in the United States in which three or more disadvantaging factors or conditions described in this report prevail and 769 counties [or nearly one-third of the strictly agricultural counties] where two or more of these factors or conditions prevail."

According to this report the three regions which have the most disadvantaged farms are the Lake States Cut-Over Region, the Appalachian-Ozark Highlands, and the Cotton Belt. The disadvantaged farm laborers are confined chiefly to California and the Pacific Coast, Florida and the Atlantic Seaboard. In one map all of the disadvantaging factors have been combined so as to clearly demark the areas in which they are most prevalent.[2] The authors state that approximately one-third of our farm people live in the dark areas of this map, and they conclude: "These areas were not reduced to poverty solely by the recent depression, although it was here that the greatest percentage of the people succumbed to the conditions of the depression and felt the impact of these conditions first and most severely." Surely, here is a condition which challenges the most searching study, and cries for remedial action.

So much for a summary statement of the situation. What are some of the outstanding *causes,* and some possible *remedial measures?*

Causes or Disadvantaging Conditions

No Native Inferiority. One of the most common explanations of the disadvantaged classes is that they are what they are because of inherent biological and mental inferiority. This has been a favorite rationalization of those in power, those who have been favored by superior advantages, among all peoples in all times. It naturally leads to the apotheosis of the so-called superior individuals and the contempt for the masses, which is characteristic of the Nazi and Fascist[3] philosophies of human relations. It is doubtless true that there are inferior strains of humanity and that they tend to concentrate under the most disadvantageous conditions, but the mass of the people who live under those conditions are what they are because of the conditions and not primarily because of native inferiority. That they survive under unfavorable conditions, and that individuals, either through unusual force of character or by being given a more favorable environment, rise out of their class and become the peers of the so-called superior classes, indicate that most of the supposed inferiority is primarily due to lack of opportunity and an inferior cultural environment. Most of us would have been little different from the mass of the people living under these disadvantaging conditions if we had been similarly reared. Where biological inferiority can be proved, let us deal with it accordingly, but until then let us not use it as an alibi for neglecting to improve conditions under which satisfactory human life is obviously impossible.

Ignorance. In the days of our pioneer forefathers a rudimentary knowledge of agriculture and a strong physique were all that were necessary to carve a homestead out of the wilderness. But today our rural economy is fairly well established, and he who would not be a victim of the more astute and grasping, must be prepared to look out for his own interests. What hope is there of raising the economic

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[1] Carl C. Taylor, Helen W. Wheeler, and E. L. Kirkpatrick, Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture. Washington, D.C., U. S. Department of Agriculture, The Farm Security Administration and The Bureau of Agricultural Economics, coöperating, Social Research Report VIII, April, 1938.

[2] Incidentally, "the counties in solid black include a larger part of Kentucky's area than of any other State," and this accounts for the fact that in 1930, 30 percent of the persons born in Kentucky were living outside their native State. From Carl C. Taylor and Conrad Taeuber. Constructive Rural Farm Population Policies, Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly XVI, p. 242, July, 1938.

[3] Cf. Robert A. Brady, The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism. New York, The Viking Press, 1937, p. 393.

and social status of those who are unable to read a contract or to do the simplest arithmetic so as to determine the correctness of an account? In a careful survey of the families on relief in the rural problem areas it was found that "one-half of the Negro family heads and one-fifth of the whites in the Eastern Cotton Belt report *no* schooling, and four-fifths of the Negroes and about one-half of the whites had less than five years."[4] Similar studies throughout the country have shown a high correlation between families on relief and lack of schooling. Lack of elementary schooling is a primary disadvantage which is insurmountable, save for exceptionally gifted individuals.

Overpopulation. Another disadvantage of the classes under discussion is that many of them live in areas which are overpopulated in relation to the resources for producing a living. When the index of fertility[5] is determined by counties and is mapped, it is found that the areas with the highest fertility are often coincident with poor land and low farm incomes. This is particularly true of the Appalachian-Ozark Highlands, which have a very high fertility rate, and is also true of much of the Cotton Belt. It is obvious that overpopulation encourages poverty, for with small holdings and large families farmers are unable to produce enough for a reasonable standard of living, and if they turn to wage-employment the surplus supply of labor makes wages low. A reduction in the birth-rate would do much to improve the condition of the disadvantaged classes. In pioneer days a large family was an economic asset, but today when education is more important, an over-large family is a liability, the children cannot be given opportunities for improvement and are forced to remain on the same level.

Sickness. Sickness has ever been associated with poverty; it is both a cause and an effect of poverty. Sickness is one of the major segments of the vicious circle which encompasses the life of disadvantaged classes. Ignorance prevents proper sanitation and the intelligent treatment of sickness. Low income results in malnutrition and the inability to provide medical care, or if medical services are obtained the family is burdened with debt and its available income is further reduced. This is particularly true for rural people, as they do not have the public health facilities, hospitals, clinics, etc., which are available for the disadvantaged classes in cities.

Thus the Social Security Board[6] has published figures showing that the number of days of disability per person in a year (from illness disability of one week or longer) was about 17 for those on relief; for those not on relief with incomes of under $1000 the number of days was about 12; and for those with incomes between $1000 and $2000 it was only 7½ days, or less than half the time for those on relief.

They are further handicapped by the fact that some diseases are particularly prevalent in the Problem Areas previously mentioned and by the high cost of medical care for those least able to pay for it. We are all familiar with the role which the hook-worm disease has played in the South, and although steady advance has been made in its treatment, it still levies an unnecessary toll. Pellagra is peculiar to the South and is directly related to low-income and malnutrition. Malaria continues to be a scourge in the same area. Venereal disease is particularly prevalent in Negro communities, as shown by Dr. C. S. Johnson in his "The Shadow of the Plantation." The death rate from syphilis among Negroes in 10 southern states is over 8 times that of whites.[7]

The difficulty and cost of obtaining adequate medical care is also a serious disadvantage for the low income classes in these areas. Doctors must necessarily charge for their time and transportation. This results in their charges being highest for families most distant from the doctor's residence, who are least able to pay because they are usually on the poorer land and have the lowest incomes. This is a problem which is common to rural life throughout the country and for which no practicable solution has yet been offered. It results in inadequate medical care for those most needing it, or in plunging them into debt and increasing their poverty. Thus in a recent study of Sickness and Medical Care in an Ozark Area in Arkansas[8] it was found that the mountain families spent only half as much for physicians' services as the village families, but that 53 percent of the mountain families were in debt for medical care as against 21 percent of the village families, and the average indebtedness of the former was three times that of the latter, in spite of the fact that the mountain people had less illness.

Poverty. To say that poverty is a chief cause of the condition of the disadvantaged rural classes seems to be a mere tautology. Yet it is true; for poverty breeds poverty, and their disadvantage consists of the fact that they have been born into a condition of poverty from which there is little chance for escape.

In addition to the causes already mentioned, the two chief factors producing poverty seem to be poor land and absentee ownership. Poor land is the limiting factor for large areas of the Appalachian-Ozark Highlands, of the Lake States Cut-Over Area, and of the eroded and worn-out soils of the eastern Cotton Belt. In the first two of these areas the operators are mostly owners, although often debt-ridden, and tenancy is not a problem, but the soil is too poor to afford a decent living upon the acreage and with the capital available. On the other hand, it is on the best soil where tenancy and absentee ownership are highest, that living conditions are sometimes at the worst. This has been strikingly shown by a recent study of the lowlands of southeast Missouri, from which the authors conclude that "Living conditions on the fertile lands of the Missouri lowlands . . . refute the American myth that a region of rich agricultural

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[4] P. G. Beck and M. C. Forster. Six Rural Problem Areas. Washington, D.C., Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Division of Research, Statistics and Finance, Research Section, Research Monograph I, 1935. p. 90.

[5] The number of children under 5 years of age per 1000 women 20 to 44 years of age is the best index of fertility which can be computed from the census returns.

[6] U. S. Social Security Board. Social Security Bulletin. Vol. 1, No. 8. Aug. 1938. p. 11, Chart II.

[7] Mary Gover. Mortality Among Southern Negroes Since 1920. Washington, D.C. U. S. Public Health Service, Public Health Bulletin No. 235, 1937. Appendix Table 7, p. 38.

In Pitt County, North Carolina, 11 percent of the Negro population gave positive Wassermann tests for syphilis, and in Macon County, Alabama, 35 percent. See O. C. Wenger, The Pitt County, N. C. Demonstration for the Control of Syphilis Among the Rural Negro Population. Washington, D.C., U. S. Public Health Service, Venereal Disease Information, Vol. XI. No. 10, Oct. 20, 1930. Table 2.

[8] Isabella C. Wilson and Wm. H. Metzlar. Sickness and Medical Care in an Ozark Area in Arkansas. Fayetteville, Ark., University of Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 353. April, 1938.

lands will always be populated by healthy, happy farm people living in security and enjoying the benefits of a rich community life."[9]

Absentee ownership has proven a curse to agriculture and rural civilization in all parts of the world throughout history. It matters not whether it be in manufacturing or mining, in agriculture or any other industry, whenever men are used merely as tools for the production of profits for those who make no contribution to the enterprise other than its capital, and in which the welfare of the workers and their families is not considered as a fundamental basis for the soundness of the industry, we have the same situation of exploited human resources and disadvantaged classes. This is the major problem facing our so-called civilization throughout the world. The American solution for it has not as yet been clearly envisaged, but we are fast coming to face the realities of the situation and to feel that the welfare of all the people is the only worthwhile goal. Freedom of opportunity is an American ideal which we have not abandoned and for which we shall find the instruments to make it a growing reality. To that end the restriction of absentee ownership of the land, in some form or other, will be necessary.

Two other factors which promote rural poverty, the one-crop system and the mechanization of farming, deserve mention. Wherever a one-crop system obtains control there seems to be a lessened production of farm products for home consumption. This has been inveighed against throughout the Cotton Belt for two generations, with some gains, but too little improvement. Thus in his recent study of the plantation system Dr. T. J. Woofter, Jr., found that the net income of the tenant family increases with the amount received as income from home use production, and that the latter decreases as the proportion of the acreage in cotton increases.[10] Tenancy and a one-crop system both decrease the subsistence values of farming, whereas one of the chief values of living on the land should be the opportunity for the farm family to grow part of its living and thus have greater security.

Much has been written concerning the possible influence of a mechanical cotton-picker on the future of labor in the South, but, whatever its effect may be, it seems evident that the mechanization of cotton culture through the larger use of tractors is already well under way, not only in the Western Cotton Belt, but invading the Mississippi Delta. Already there has been a considerable displacement of tenants and share croppers and a change to the employment of day-wage hands at the rush seasons, with a consequent increase of families on relief in the towns and villages.[11]

[9] Max R. White, Douglas Ensminger, and Cecil R. Gregory. Rich Land—Poor People. Indianapolis, Ind. United States Department of Agriculture. Farm Security Administration, Region III. Research Report No. 1. Jan. 1938. p. 2. (Mimeographed).

[10] T. J. Woofter, Jr. Landlord and Tenant on the Cotton Plantation. Washington, D.C. Works Progress Administration, Division of Social Research, Research Monograph 5, 1936. p. 84 and Appendix Table 40.

[11] Paul S. Taylor. Power Farming and Labor Displacement in the Cotton Belt, 1937, Washington, D.C., U. S. Department of Labor, Monthly Labor Review, March, April, 1938; William C. Holley and Lloyd Arnold. Changes in Technology and Labor Requirements in Crop Production—Cotton. Philadelphia, Pa., Works Progress Administration, National Research Project. Report No. A-7. September, 1938.

Remedial Measures

Education. We have seen that lack of education is a primary disadvantage. One of the reasons for this is that the states which have the least schooling have the least wealth per capita for supporting schools. To remedy this inequality of opportunity there has for many years been an agitation for financial aid to schools by the federal government. This has now received powerful support from the recommendations of the President's Advisory Committee on Education,[12] which has clearly established the need and has outlined desirable policies. As a result there was introduced in the last Congress the Harrison-Thomas-Fletcher Bill for federal support for public education, and this measure has the enthusiastic support of the most important educational and rural organizations. There is every promise that this measure will be a major issue before the next Congress. It is the policy of the American Country Life Association to take no position on matters of legislation or pass resolutions on matters of public policy. I may, however, express my personal opinion that the report of the Advisory Committee on Education will go down in history with that of President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission as one of the charters for better rural life, and that if the proposed legislation is enacted, it will have as far-reaching effects as the Smith-Lever and Smith-Hughes Acts. Every leader in rural life should, therefore, become informed concerning this measure and aid in the education of public opinion concerning it.

Better educational facilities will, besides reducing the handicap of ignorance, also be an important means of preventing overpopulation and of motivating economic advancement. For some unknown reason better education results in a decreased birth-rate. It also stimulates new desires for a higher standard of living, without which there is little hope for economic improvement.

Economic Improvement. The creation of a desire for a better standard of living is an essential stimulus to personal effort to get out of the clutches of poverty. In many rural areas the disadvantaged classes have lived so long on a low standard of living that they know nothing else, and are either fairly hardened to their condition or have lost hope for its improvement. No help of permanent value can be given them which does not involve their own initiative and a desire for better things which is strong enough to motivate sustained effort. For instance, it is obvious that the housing conditions in many rural sections, particularly in the South,[13] are deplorable, but any attempt to furnish these people better houses will probably be largely unsuccessful unless they want them enough to work and save for them and appreciate good houses sufficiently to take care of them.

On the other hand we need to beware of the idea that

[12] The Advisory Committee on Education (Floyd W. Reeves, Chairman). Report of the Committee, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1938.

[13] Cf. S. H. Hobbs, Jr. Rural Housing Problem in the South. Rural Sociology, vol. 3, pp. 279-295. Sept. 1938; Deane G. Carter, Study of Rural Housing. Univ. of Ark. Agr. Exp. Station, Bulletin 364, June, 1938; W. D. Nicholls, John H. Bondurant and Z. L. Galloway, Farm Incomes and Land Utilization in Knox County, Kentucky Agr. Exp. Station, Bulletin 375. Nov. 1937, pp. 178-183. In Knox County 44% of the farm houses were valued at less than $100, 68% at less than $200, and only 32% at over $200.

creating a desire for the mere gadgets of modern civilization will produce a better rural culture or more human happiness. Electric washing-machines and mechanical refrigerators are aids to a better life, but in and of themselves do not necessarily produce it.

The tenants and sharecroppers of the South probably form the largest disadvantaged class in American agriculture. The facts concerning their situation have been well presented by the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy[14] and numerous studies by official and private agencies.[15] The recent Farm Tenant Act is a step in the right direction and will ultimately aid thousands of the better class of tenants to become owners. There is, however, a widespread feeling among those best informed on the problem that to attempt to make owners out of the mass of Southern tenants in the immediate future is an impossible task. When people have lived under one system for generations and have lost initiative and the managerial ability which is acquired through growing up under a system in which they manage their own affairs, it is too much to expect that many of them will soon acquire the ability to become owner-operators under the present difficult conditions of agriculture. The plantation system is the result of historical evolution and has certain definite advantages, although under present conditions it is often a hazardous business for the owner and offers little opportunity for advancement by the tenant.

Several competent students of plantation management have made suggestions for experiments with a system of plantation management which would give better opportunity for the advancement of the tenant. One of the most promising of these plans was recently outlined to me by Dr. G. H. Aull of Clemson College (S. C.). His proposal is based upon the assumption that a large proportion of tenants are ill prepared to assume the responsibilities of ownership, and that there are many farm owners who are capable of managing labor—including tenants—to a much greater extent than their present resources permit. He suggests that a number of farms, sufficient to form the most economic unit of management, be brought together under State or Federal ownership. That a manager be employed on salary and that all labor be employed at specific wage rates, but that the workers be paid cash for only part of their wages, sufficient to maintain them and to take the place of the present "furnish" system. The balance of their wages would be invested for them in shares in the profits of the plantation. With strict accounting methods, the surplus made after paying all costs of operation would be prorated to the wage-earners according to the number of shares earned by them. This system would not contemplate the purchase by the tenant of any part of the plantation on which he worked. It would rather serve as a training school for him, and if and when the tenant acquired sufficient ability to enter farming for himself, he could then have the aid of the Federal Farm Tenant Act. It would seem that some such plan should be given a careful trial by the Farm Security Administration or by private agencies, to determine its economic feasibility and its possibilities for improving the condition of plantation workers. Since coming here I have learned that the Farm Security Administration is already experimenting with similar plans.

Under such a system it would be possible, with wise and unselfish leadership, to build up a coöperative system for the purchase of agricultural and family supplies, which should aid in reducing the cost of living and free the workers from the exorbitant costs of the "furnish" system. The remarkable success of the coöperative enterprises promoted by the extension staff of Saint Xavier University,[16] Antigonish, N. S., among the poor fishermen of Nova Scotia, has shown what can be done in this field when devoted leadership educates the people as to how they may help themselves.

Such a system would also provide for production for home use. There has been substantial agreement for more than a generation that only through a more self-sufficient type of agriculture, and relatively less exclusive devotion to cash crops, can the condition of the mass of southern tenant farmers be improved. Concerning this I have seen no better statement than that in a recent address of Dr. Carl C. Taylor, who from long experience and study is an authority on the problem:

> "Woofter's plantation study also shows that the production by tenants and share croppers of home-consumable products was so slight that the advances from the commissaries during the summer months were not influenced in the least by the production for home consumption of products which these tenant and cropper families under a 'live-at-home' program could have completely furnished themselves. Farm families by the hundreds of thousands in the Cotton Belt of the South could not only improve their material standard of living by producing these products at home, but could save the money which they now spend for food products, and use that money for additional things to be purchased from the market, which additional things they do not now have. I have personally never been able to understand why anyone imagines that those of us who urge 'live-at-home' farming assume that such a system of farming would in any way reduce the practice of also producing for the market. The plain facts are that at the present time the people about whom we are talking not only fail to a considerable extent to produce their home supplies, but they fail to buy many things which they should have because they must spend what little cash comes into their hands to *purchase* food supplies instead of other things."[17]

Health Facilities. We have seen that the disadvantaged rural classes lack the services of physicians and of hospitals. In 1934 there were only 1700 of the 3072 counties in the United States which had hospitals for general community

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[14] Farm Tenancy; Report of the President's Committee. Prepared under the auspices of the National Resources Committee. Washington, United States Government Printing Office, Feb. 1937.

[15] See bibliography of the last reference and Arthur F. Raper, Preface to Peasantry; A Tale of Two Black Counties. Chapel Hill, N. C. The University of North Carolina Press, 1936.

[16] Bertram B. Fowler. The Lord Helps Those. Survey Graphic, XXVII, pp. 340-343. June 1938. Also Vanguard Press, 1938.

Mary Elliott Arnold and Morel Reed. Something's Happening in Nova Scotia. Rural America. XV, pp. 3-6. Oct., 1937.

[17] Carl C. Taylor. Constructive Measures for Dealing With the South's Population Problems. Rural Sociology, Vol. 3, p. 251. Sept. 1938.

use,[18] and probably nearly as many counties are without such hospitals today. The deficit of hospitals is to be found chiefly in the disadvantaged areas, notably in the South "where more than 1,000,000 persons living in 8 states had less than 1 hospital bed for every 2,000 persons"[19] although 1 bed per 1,000 persons is considered a necessary minimum. North Carolina has made rapid strides in the development of county hospitals with the help of the Duke Foundation and its experience may well be studied by other states. There is a definite need for more county hospitals supported wholly or in part by taxation.

The need for more rural physicians is equally acute, for in 15 States there is less than 1 physician per 1000 population.[20] The matter of equalizing the cost of medical care for rural families is even more important and there have been few experiments in this country to find a solution of the problem. The State long ago assumed responsibility for public education. Is not the health of the people as important as their education? I am not advocating any outright system of State medicine, but it is entirely possible to devise a system of county or state subsidies for transportation charges so that the cost of medical care will be equalized for all rural people, with the present system of private practice. Equalization of costs between localities in a county and between counties in a state is now generally recognized as necessary in our educational system. Why should not the same principle be applied to the cost of medical care?

Rural public health work has grown rapidly in the last two decades. In 1920 there were but 81 county public health units in the United States. In 1931 there were 573. The number declined during the next three years, but with federal aid under the Social Security Act, it has again increased in the last two years. Thanks to the support of the Rockefeller Foundation the largest growth of county health units has been in the South, where they were most needed; but much remains to be done to strengthen their services. and the principle of federal aid for such work is as sound as for roads or education.

The second meeting of this association at Chicago in 1919 formed the first national conference on rural health. At that meeting the report of the Committee on Rural Health and Sanitation, of which Dr. W. S. Rankin, then secretary of the State Board of Health of North Carolina, was secretary, contained the following prophetic recommendations:

> "Your committee believes that you should approve the participation of all governments, federal, state, and local, in rural health work. The federal government has accepted for a number of years, and it has established a precedent that will not be upset, that it has certain interests in large and fundamental public problems such as education, the promotion of agriculture and the development of good roads. Certainly the matter of health, as fundamental and of as general interest as any public problem can be, is a matter with which the federal government has a very real and vital interest."[21]

The demand for federal aid for rural health facilities is not, therefore, a new idea of the recent National Health Conference or the New Deal, but has had a steady growth since the World War. Possibly this Association should hold another national conference on Rural Health in the near future.

Giving Joy to Life. Whatever may be done to improve the material standards of living will be handicapped and will not come to the best fruition if means are not taken to bring more joy into rural life. This may be promoted through better recreation and the encouragement of appreciation of the beautiful. Time permits only a mention of this phase of our problem, but I cannot neglect calling attention to it, or it may be lost sight of in our subsequent discussions.

Life is drab without some fun and without wholesome social contacts. Healthy amusement is an antidote and preventive for many of the ills of humanity, whatever its social or economic status. Recreation and social life need not involve expense and are within the reach of all if there be some leadership. The school, the church, and the extension service, have an opportunity and an obligation to train this leadership in programs of simple and enjoyable forms of recreation and social life.

And life is sordid where there is no appreciation of beauty. The house with a few dahlias in the yard, or red geraniums in the window, with a few shrubs and a little green lawn, is thereby labelled as a better home. Last summer I made a short trip by motor through the highlands of Virginia, Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina. I went into some out-of-the-way places and visited some places which I had not seen for forty years. The one thing which gave me most satisfaction, and which is doubtless in part due to the penetration of good roads, was the improvement in the home grounds. Village yards were attractively landscaped, and many a humble mountain cabin had flowers and shrubs, and the veranda shaded by trumpet-vine or moonvine. The very definite increase in the love of beautiful surroundings, however simple and inexpensive, is a notable advance in our rural culture in recent years.

The people who have a little music in their lives are thereby given a source of strength and enjoyment, and this is native to some of the disadvantaged rural classes. Is it not remarkable that the only distinctive American music has come from the Negro folks songs, the ballads of the Mountaineers, and the songs of the Western cowboys; from the work songs of the common people?

So in any program for improving the life of the disadvantaged classes consideration should be given not only to those means which will give them more of the so-called necessities of life, but it must be recognized that the fulness of life is in the human spirit and that better recreation and social life and the appreciation of the beautiful are what give joy to life.

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[18] Blanche Halbert. Hospitals for Rural Communities. Washington, D.C. U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers Bulletin 1792. Nov. 1937. p. 3

[19] *Ibid.* p. 4.

[20] Howard W. Odum. Southern Regions of the United States. Chapel Hill, N. C. University of North Carolina Press, 1936. p. 370. for map showing relative distribution by states of physicians and hospitals.

[21] American Country Life Association. Rural Health: Proceedings of the Second National Country Life Conference. Washington, D.C. 1920. p. 95.

Religion. I hesitate to speak of the role of religion in improving the condition of the disadvantaged rural classes, for it is a subject upon which there are wide differences of very fundamental convictions. Yet I am so certain that without a motivation which is fundamentally religious there will be little advance in improving their condition, that I would be derelict if I omitted consideration of this basic factor.

Those who have studied the churches and religious life of the disadvantaged areas are pretty well agreed that they are largely ineffectual in making any marked improvement in the life of their people. Whatever our theological beliefs may be, it is evident that the emphasis needs to be changed from one which is largely an other-worldly point of view to one which conceives the task of the Church as building the Kingdom of God *now* in the local community, and that people may be saved or damned through their environment as well as through their personal attitudes toward salvation or sin. Whatever may be done to give a more realistic outlook to the religious leaders of the disadvantaged classes, should be given every encouragement possible.

But even more important is to create a new attitude among the church members of the better classes in the disadvantaged areas, a conviction of the fundamental teaching of Jesus Christ that human personality is a supreme value irrespective of social or economic status, which will inspire them to promote an aggressive campaign for improving the condition of their own disadvantaged rural classes in a practical manner.

Some of the finest work of this sort has been the maintenance of schools in the Appalachian Highlands and these institutions have created a desire for public schools which are now possible with better roads, and which are taking their place. The future of these church-supported schools is a problem, but it seems quite possible that many of them might well be maintained for some time as social and cultural centers, helping their people to create a better environment.

One of the most forward-looking movements has recently arisen among town and country ministers of the Southern Methodist denomination in the delta section of Arkansas, aided by leading officers of their General Board of Christian Education. Acting without publicity, some fifty such ministers have been studying Arkansas life and labor as affected by tenancy, facing their own social problems and asking themselves the responsibility of the church for helping to solve them. When the rural clergy are thus willing to come to grips with the problems of the disadvantaged in their own parishes, the class about which Jesus showed most concern, there will be a reawakening of the responsibility of their people with the dynamic which only religious conviction can provide.

Leadership. Through this religious dynamic will come a devoted leadership, for there is an essentially religious attitude in all true leadership, and without leadership none of the means of improvement suggested can be achieved. To motivate rural leadership is, therefore, one of the chief aims of the rural church. The training and inspiration of leadership is also a major function of the colleges and high schools. All progress depends on leadership, and leadership arises from a divine discontent with existing conditions.

One of the best means of propagating leadership is to bring before the people by printed or spoken word accounts of the work and results of successful leaders. Everyone thrills to the story of a true leader. The work of Fathers Tompkins and Coady with the coöperatives of the Nova Scotia fishermen, already mentioned,[16] is an inspiring case of devoted leadership. A recent number of RURAL AMERICA[22] carried a wonderful example of what a wife of a plantation manager in the delta country of Poinsett County, Arkansas, has done for the children of sharecroppers as teacher in a dilapidated country school which had been the despair of her predecessors. With such devotion miracles can be accomplished, and a vision of the opportunities and spiritual rewards of such service incites others to assume leadership responsibilities in whatever capacity they are able.

Ever since the inception of the Coöperative Demonstration Work, the county farm and home demonstration agents have been outstanding leaders for rural improvement. Unfortunately, however, the very nature of their work has naturally developed a constituency among the more progressive rural people, who have largely absorbed their time, so that, by and large, they have been unable to devote much time to helping the disadvantaged classes who most need their help and who require the best leadership. Recently the Farm Security Administration is coöperating with the State Extension Services in supporting county farm and home supervisors for their rehabilitation clients, and they are becoming the chief factors in the success of this program. There are, however, far too few of them and they need a special training for this work. The extension workers in agriculture and home economics lack the essential knowledge of social case work, while the social welfare workers lack a knowledge of agriculture and rural life. Qualifications for this type of work should be a combination of those of the social welfare worker and the agricultural and home demonstration agent. This combination rarely exists and the new type of rural welfare worker will have to be trained for the job. Here is an opportunity and obligation for the agricultural colleges to train rural leaders who will have the necessary knowledge of both fields and who will have a missionary zeal for helping the disadvantaged rural classes. No programs for their improvement, however well financed or sound in their objectives, will be able to succeed without competent as well as zealous and devoted leadership.

But if this leadership is to be permanently successful it must recognize that no movement can succeed which depends solely upon *employed* leadership. The ultimate success of any movement depends upon its enlistment of local lay leaders who serve a cause because of their devotion to it, and the test of employed or professional leadership is the degree to which it can enlist and train local leaders.

The Comprehensive Program. One of the conclusions to which Christian missionaries throughout the world, and such philanthropic agencies as the Near East Foundation, who are attempting to improve the life[23] of backward peoples, is that they can do so only by means of a comprehensive program which will improve their life as a whole and not

[22] Mrs. Alex East. Rehabilitation in the Delta. Rural America XVI, pp. 8-9, May, 1938.

[23] See D. Spencer Hatch. Further Upward in Rural India. Madras, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1938. p. 8.

through a concentrated attack on only one segment or phase of life. Religion without bread is futile; but food cannot be raised by the diseased. Therefore, they have seen the need of coordinating their efforts in a comprehensive all-round program for spiritual, mental, physical, economic, and social improvement. Life is one, and the different phases of life are interdependent. This is the point of view of the American Country Life Association and one which constantly needs reiteration and which it is our function to implement for rural improvement.

This is the twenty-first meeting of the American Country Life Association. It was founded in the days of reconstruction at the close of the World War, as a means of coordinating the efforts of national agencies interested in the improvement of rural life. I was privileged to be responsible for organizing the programs of the first two annual meetings and I appreciate the honor of presiding at this session when the Association becomes of age.

The situation which we face today has many similarities to that of 1918, although the sanguine hopes for national reconstruction then so common have not been realized and we are still engaged in trying to learn how to reconstruct rural life upon the basis of the bitter experience of the last eight years. In the call for the first National Country Life Conference the Committee on Country Life, which inaugurated it, made the following statement which is equally pertinent today:

> "The Economic needs of rural life are being appreciated as never before and real progress is being made by many agencies attempting to meet them. The fundamental problems of rural life are not solely economic, but also involve better social organization. At present there is no means of bringing together the leaders of agencies working for better country life, to consider their common objectives and to better correlate their efforts in a common program. This is the field of the Committee on Country Life. Its conference will not be a convention. It will attempt no propaganda, at least until its work is thoroughly established. It will seek to establish a better understanding of existing rural social conditions and the agencies for improving them, with a view to formulating a comprehensive statement of principles, policies and relations, which may form a basis for programs of work, so that there may be larger correlation of effort and a more general recognition of the goals of country life."[24]

Through the years the Association has made steady progress in realizing its objectives and has had a large influence on the rural leaders of the country. Relatively few, however, of the rank and file of rural leaders are privileged to attend national conferences. If the objectives of this Association are to be more fully achieved it will be through the formation of state and county country life associations, or similar organizations of whatever name, which will have as their aim the bringing together of all the agencies and leaders of movements working for better rural life within their areas. If such a movement can be started in the areas in which the disadvantaged rural classes are most numerous, and can enlist the participation of those who are attacking the common problem from different angles, from that of education, health, social welfare, religion, agriculture and homemaking and family life, it will become a vital force for improving the conditions which now disadvantage from one-fourth to one-third of our rural people.

[24] National Country Life Association. Proceedings First National Country Life Conference. Ithaca, N. Y., 1920. p. 2.

Dr. Dwight Sanderson is professor of rural organization at Cornell University, rural sociologist in the Experiment Station, and president of the American Country Life Association. DISADVANTAGED CLASSES IN RURAL LIFE was delivered as Dr. Sanderson's presidential address at the meeting of the American Country Life Association held in Lexington, Kentucky, November 1938. The paper is reprinted with permission from the December 1938 number of RURAL AMERICA.